



How to Identify Credible Sources of Health Information in the Digital Age

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Finding credible health information can be hard. The internet has so much information and it can be hard to know what is valid. It is important to know how to tell if information is unbiased and factual.

Below are factors that will help to identify credible sources of information:

Language and Presentation

- The language should not be dramatic or emotional, but rather factual and straightforward.
- The claims should not be “too good to be true.”
- The platform should be professional.
 - Free of offensive language, images or criticizing topics without evidence to support claims.

Time

- The sources used to support claims should be current (less than 10 years ago). New research may have come up that disproves claims.
- Sometimes there is no new research on a topic. In this case, older sources may be still credible.

Evidence

- The author should provide evidence to support any claim being made.
 - There should be a list where references are provided.
 - The gold standard for evidence is scientific journal articles. These are reviewed by experts in the field (peer-reviewed).
- A personal story about one experience is not good quality. This is not acceptable for making recommendations for a diverse population.

Bias

- Biased sources will slant information. These sources try to change the mind of the reader instead of presenting facts.
- Biased sources may use strong and emotional words, like “everyone knows” or “people say.”

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- Truthful information is presented in an unbiased way. Information on both sides of a debate are presented. That way, the reader can then make an informed decision.
- If the source is trying to sell something, it is often biased.

Expertise

- The author should have schooling and formal training in the topic:
 - Nutrition advice should be provided by a registered dietitian.
 - Medical advice should be provided by a medical doctor.
- Read about the author and their education.
 - If their background is not provided or related to the subject, they are not a reliable source.
 - If their background is not provided, search for them on Google to find out more information.

What Is Confirmation Bias and Why Is It Important?

Confirmation bias is also called “cherry-picking” evidence. It is choosing information that confirms the readers’ beliefs without looking at the other side of the story. This may result in biased decision making.

It is a partial decision-making process. This leads to avoiding quality evidence that may be right, but that contradicts the readers’ beliefs.

Cherry-picking can be risky and lead to misinformation. It can lead to confidence in a topic, despite evidence against it. This is why picking credible sources of information is important.

Websites As Sources

More Reliable - Informative websites (.edu, .gov or .mil)

- Unbiased.
- Factual information.
- Reviewed by expert in the field or run by a board or editors.
- Run usually by educational bodies or the government.
- Verification to create one is required.

Less Reliable - Advocacy websites (.com, .net or .org)

- Tend to be biased.
- No verification is required, so anyone can create one.
- Meant to sway public opinion.
- Tend to be non-profit groups.
- However, some societies may provide credible information.
 - American Heart Association and Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics are examples.

Less Reliable - Blogs

- Not a reliable source.
- Biased.
- Tend to be written by those who lack formal background in the subject.
- Tend to present information in a one-sided fashion leading to misrepresentation.
- Usually selling a product.
- No verification required, so anyone can create one.
- Not fact-checked or reviewed by experts in the field.
- However, some blogs are written by experts in the field. Review the authors background information to find out.

Social Media

- The information offered will likely be biased. This means that it will be based on things the reader likes or agrees with (no matter how correct or true it is).
- Anyone can publish on social media, therefore it is not fact-checked.

Websites are created for several purposes. Sometimes they are created to market a product, educate, entertain or to

try and convince the reader of something. Knowing the type of site can help to determine the source of the information. There are always exceptions. There may be credible sites that do not provide credible information. There also may be non-credible sites that do provide credible information.

Peer-Reviewed Scientific Literature: The Gold Standard

Peer-review means that articles are written by experts in a field. These articles are reviewed by other experts (peers) before being published. This process ensures high-quality and unbiased information.

Peer-reviewed scientific literature is like an online database. It contains a pool of journals and all scientific evidence. Use PubMed, GoogleScholar or ScienceDirect to find peer-reviewed scientific journal articles. These sites provide credible sources of information. They are commonly used by healthcare professionals and scientists.

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